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*For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.*

ON PROVIDING BETTER REDDING FOR  
THE POOR.

**T**HE comforts of the poor have been latterly so largely insisted upon, so many volumes have been written of exhortation to the rich, and of advice to the needy, that by this time one would imagine that the hut of the peasant was the abode of content and neatness, and that his hovel like that of Baucis and Philemon, had grown into a habitable residence.

Experience however (that scrutinizing inquirer, who is not to be deceived by plausible theory substituted for practical benevolence) tells a very different story. A cursory glance at the outside of the cabin, stamps it the habitation of filth and misery, and when you enter, this conviction becomes certainty; all is nastiness and disorder, you cannot look without being offended by irregularity, you cannot tread without being defiled by filth, and were it not that some neighbouring mansion-house strikes you with an air of civilization, you might, without much violence to the imagination, suppose yourself in the wilds of Tartary, or the recesses of new Zealand.

Nor are the miserable inhabitants out of character with their shed; their persons begrimed with filth, their tattered garments and matted hair, the canker of sickness which undermines their frames, and the look of despair which saddens their countenances, are unequivocal proofs of the badness of their food, the defectiveness of their clothing, and above all, of that despondency which arises from the uncertainty of their own state, and the anticipation of that poverty and dependence which must be the lot of their offspring.

To investigate this wretchedness, to trace it up to its true sources, and to discover why England should be a century more advanced in civilization than Ireland, though governed by the same laws, and divided but by a narrow sea, is a task which I leave for the present to your other Correspondents. I shall confine myself to the consideration of one a-

mongst the host of miseries which infest the Irish peasant, and suggest a mode of alleviating it, which may be carried into execution without much risk or trouble.

Those who know any thing of the diseases of the lower classes are aware that rheumatism stands foremost on the list, and that the beds on which they lie are the source of the disease; if, indeed, a heap of forlorn rubbish in a corner of the hovel, deserves the name of bed, a cum-pound for the most of rotten straw and moist rushes, impregnated with the damp of the floor, and the dripping of the roof, called into action by the heat of the bodies which are nightly deposited upon it, and engendering maladies, which embitter life without abridging it, and subject the sufferer to all the prolonged varieties of arthritic torture. To prevent this protraction of pain would seem an easy task to those who know nothing of human nature and the difficulty of extracting money for charitable purposes from the pockets of the rich. A bedstead of rough wood costs little, and a sheaf of dry straw still less, and one would imagine that common compassion would supply these indispensable necessities to the indigent, or that (putting pity out of the question) policy would minister to the health of the labourer, upon whose exertions the gentry depend for their daily bread; but the observation proves such a persuasion false, it is notorious that in the scale of society accommodation is in the inverse ratio of utility; that he who sows and reaps the harvest, who waters the furrow with his sweat, and creates abundance with his sinews, is lodged where his employer would not venture his hogs, and fed much worse; while avarice spins the thread so fine between exertion and existence, that just enough of consistency is granted to preserve the bond, and the balance seems exactly struck between the greatest toil, and the poorest sustenance. There are some, who, in contempt of religion and in defiance of common feeling, nay of self-interest, think this system right, and hug themselves in conviction that the labourer is so

differently constituted from themselves, as to be insensible to cold, to hunger, and to nakedness, and capable of enduring the vicissitudes of a variable climate, which they are hardly able to encounter, fortified with every comfort that ingenuity, selfishness and opulence can supply; to such, an appeal in behalf of poverty is nugatory, they would deride the vindicator of the indigent, and brand him either with treason or methodism; there are others who feel differently, and to them I would suggest the propriety of making some provision for the well-being of the poor; and none seems more obvious as well as more essential than what relates to their bedding; they should be all induced to alter the fatal habit which necessity has engendered of sleeping on the damp floor of their cabins, and furnished with sufficient covering to protect them from the inclemency of the season, nor will this essential relief fall heavily on the better classes, if they adopt a plan which has heretofore been attended with success, and in its issue reflected equal credit upon the honour and punctuality of the poor, and the truly christian and persevering character of its inestimable proposer.\* He, in conjunction with some of the more opulent inhabitants in his neighbourhood, subscribed a sum of money with which a number of blankets were purchased at the opening of the winter 1799; thus, bought in quantity, and consequently in reduced price, they were distributed amongst the poor, at their original value, upon condition of repayment at the rate of sixpence a week, and this repayment was guaranteed to the subscribers by one or two solvent individuals, who passed a security for the punctual reimbursement by instalments.† This arrangement, which imparted the most effectual relief, in the way most convenient to the labourer and least onerous upon the opulent, was attended with the most

complete success; the individuals who had so liberally come forward with the loan of their money, had no reason to repent their confidence or their generosity; they were repaid the principal with scrupulous exactness, and in lieu of a pecuniary interest, received the still gratitude of distress essentially relieved, that sentiment which leaves a permanent impression on the mind; which blesseth him that gives, and him that receives, and attaches the rich to the poor by the indissoluble bond of reciprocal esteem. At a future opportunity I shall trouble you with some further observations upon this subject, and a detail of the plan above alluded to, the receipts and disbursements, and the mode so judiciously adopted of making the security of the liberal consistent with the succour of the indigent. In the mean time, if what has been already urged should induce any to associate for a similar purpose, they will, if proper precautions be taken, secure to themselves a very solid gratification at a very trifling sacrifice of time and money, and effectuate that species of good most wanted in Ireland, a good unmixed with ostentation, which does not break down the mind by a sense of obligation, cherishing the principles of economy and foresight, and conferring lasting comfort on the family of the labourer.

BENEVOLOUS.

*For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.*

ON THE AURORA BOREALIS.

IT is a curious circumstance that, the *aurora borealis* (as far as the writer of this article has been able to discover) has not been observed, either in England or Ireland, during this winter or the preceding; whether it has appeared, as usual, in the northern parts of Scotland, or in any part of the Continent in the same parallel of latitude with us, would be worth while to inquire. This phenomenon is so well known in this country under the name of *streamers*, that it is unnecessary for us here to spend much time in describing it. It generally begins in the north extending towards the west, but sometimes inclining to-

\* The Rev. James Dunne.

† This plan has been adopted by the Maryborough Charitable Society, see *Belfast Monthly Magazine* for August 1809, page 104.